

# CONSIDERATIONS

ON ABSTINENCE FROM THE USE OF THE PRODUCTS OF SLAVE LABOR.

ADDRESSED TO THE MEMBERS OF OHIO YEARLY MEETING.

*"And they said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear, and therefore is this distress come upon us." Gen. chap. 42nd, 21st.*

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Before proceeding to call the attention of our members particularly to the subject of Slave Labor Products, we wish to make a few, plain, preliminary Propositions, upon the truth of which must be based the correctness of our remarks.

Every individual, of every clime, color or creed, has a right, first to himself, second to his time, and third to the products of his toil. In the exercise of these rights, he must not abridge those of his fellowmen; and he ever stands accountable to the Righteous judge of all.

That individual, who deprives a human being of himself, commits the highest crime possible for man to perpetrate, except wilfully taking the life of another. Should he sell his fellow being, he becomes a Trafficker in human flesh, a Barterer of humanity, a Slave Trader.

That person who buys a fellow being, or continues to hold him in bonds, deprives him of his time, and compels him to employ his strength, against his will, for the sole gratification or interest of the purchaser, is a Slaveholder; and his crime can evidently only be less than that of the Trafficker in slaves.

But each individual has a right, not only to himself and to his time, but to the products of his toil. Hence, that person who knowingly purchases or uses the products of compulsory, unrequited labor, is accessory in robbing his fellowman of his rightful gains, and is a Slave Product Consumer. His guilt must be estimated by the measure of light with which he has been furnished, and his knowledge of the fact, that those goods are the fruit of compulsory and unpaid toil.

Admitting the truth of these nearly self-evident Propositions, we have three classes of our community, upon whom

must inevitably rest the fearful responsibility of sustaining, extending and perpetuating the entire System of Slavery ; thus perpetrating the enormous crime of holding our colored brethren in bondage, and, in many instances, blotting out their intellectual existence, which is as much more than mere physical oppression, as fetters upon the body are less oppressive and more endurable, than tyranny over mind, over our thoughts, wills, hopes and affections.

These three classes are, First, the Slave Trader : he who robs a man of himself and sells him to another. Second, the Slaveholder : he who robs the slave of his time, consequently of all he has or is capable of procuring, and dooms him to a life of unrequited toil. And third, the Slave Product Consumer, who, with the Slaveholder, is accessory in robbing him of the product of his unpaid labor.

The first of these classes, though least in numbers, we are accustomed to hold greatest in crime. The Slave Trader upon the high seas is treated as a pirate ; and he is justly held in abhorrence by all virtuous and honorable citizens.

The second, much larger in numbers, embraces an influential, wealthy, intelligent and enterprising class in our Republic. The last, though much the largest, we will suppose least implicated in crime, among which may be numbered our most valuable, virtuous, benevolent, and truly honorable citizens.

Yet the practical effect of their participation is such, as directly to sustain the two former in their iniquitous system of oppression. Where there are no purchasers production must necessarily cease. True, they would neither steal, buy, or work a man for their own interests ; but they will buy, sell, and for their benefit, use the products of that man, who, they know, was stolen, bought, and worked, against his will, for the interest of another. They furnished the motive, which makes it the interest of the Slaveholder to oppress and drive his slave, and the Slave Trader to supply the exhaustion and waste of human life, consequent upon the oppressive System of Slavery.

These impressive truths are thus plainly presented, that, at one comprehensive glance, we may observe the relations, the various parts of the entire System sustain to each other. Lest it might be thought our positions are too strongly taken, we will introduce a few striking paragraphs from "The Friend," by a recent writer, over the signature of Castor.

"Let the most cool and conservative philosopher set himself to consider the whole subject of American Slavery ; let him ponder the progress of the civilized world in refinement and humanity ; let him recall the course of the enlightened

monarchies of Europe, with regard to similar institutions in their own dominions; let him recollect the high pretensions our nation holds out to the world, of superior advancement in the principles of liberty and the recognition of universal, human rights:—let him then descend to the particulars of the monstrous iniquity tolerated in our own borders, with all its attendant horrors; the barbarous means made use of to procure the unhappy victims from their native country; the sufferings of the middle passage; the degradation of human nature in the sale at auction of human beings; the total destruction of all ties, conjugal and parental; the inhuman torture of the lash, inflicted irrespectively of age or sex; the hopeless life of misery and bondage to which the wretched sufferer is doomed: and all this, in our own land, under our own law, and, in some measure, under our own individual influence, and he must be more or less than man, if his feelings and indignation be not roused to the highest pitch by the contemplation.”

“It would seem indeed, as though imperative duty to humanity itself demanded, that the whole moral power of Christendom should be exerted for the suppression of such a crying evil. It is also manifest, that in no way could this power be brought to bear so appropriately or so effectually, as by the united action of religious communities.”

“No marvel therefore, that the advocates of emancipation have invoked the aid of the church, and that disappointment and disaffection have been the consequence of its refusal to cooperate in the work.”

“Our own Society, long before the subject of slavery had excited general attention in this country, took ground unitedly against its toleration within our borders; and has since that time, by example and by frequent public protest, exerted an influence against its existence in our land.”

“The exercise of a temporising policy among other religious communities however, and a desire to avert the unpleasant consequences of decided action, which Friends boldly met at any hazard of individual offence, has, in our opinion, prevented a complete discharge of their duty in this important movement, and has cast odium upon the cause of religion itself.”

Thus are we brought directly to the consideration of our duty as a Society in relation to this momentous subject. Let us then examine the depth of our participation in the crime of Slavery, and those causes which may serve to mitigate our guilt.

Nobly and fearlessly did our forefathers throw from their shoulders the burthens of oppression. Neither did they suppose their work accomplished by the emancipation of their

own slaves. They labored faithfully, through evil and through good report, for the enfranchisement of their fellow men; and the effect of their united labors can be known only unto Him, whose counsel they sought and to whom they looked in humble hope for a blessing on their labors. The rich harvest of their faithfulness will be reaped by coming generations. But, in doing so much, did they perform all that might and should have been accomplished? Has their mantle fallen upon their children, and yet left them little more to do? They were not then prepared unitedly to take that higher and most consistent ground above all participation, not only in holding slaves, but against consuming the products of slavery. That was a work left for our accomplishment, when almost every avenue for effective action in relation to slavery is closed against us.

A few pure and tender spirits, among whom must stand ever memorable a Woolman and a Benezet, saw the whole length of the grinding chain of oppression. They took a noble stand against all participation in the unrighteous fruits of exacted toil. Individuals have never been wanting among us, who have followed hopefully their footsteps, and their number was gradually increasing in weight and influence. But their feelings, opinions and example, were either not fully appreciated or misunderstood. Our Society became at length, deeply as most others, involved in the traffic and consumption of slave grown products.

Nor was this result without any cause. A wide and painful departure from the faith of our forefathers, engaged for a time the attention of the standard bearers in our Society. It resulted in a lamentable separtion throughout our borders. The subject of slavery consequently received less attention. But the morning of a brighter day was begining to dawn upon us. Through the instrumentality of the labor of some of our predecessors, the public mind, in the Free States, was fast becomeing enlightened respecting the enormities of slavery, which was now rapidly extending, and had already become insolent in power. Friends saw the necessity of reviving and continuing their work "in the midst of the years."

The course pursued by some of our members, who felt deeply the wrongs of the slave, was not always tempered with that wisdom which is profitable to direct. Those of our members, who sought alone the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not only in all their religious movements, but in the prosecution of meny benevolent enterprise, seemed afraid to encourage a work of philanthropy, persecuted through measures they could not oppose. While it is seriously to be feared, not a few stood aloof from their brethren engaged in the work of humanity, though unwillingness to examine carefully the grounds

of their dissent, and to make those sacrifices required by a faithful discharge of their duty to the community, and toward their fellow men in bonds. It may be hoped our feelings and views are beginning more fully to harmonize, that an increasing interest is felt in the cause of humanity; and that we are now more willing to sacrifice convenience or interest, fully to clear our own hands, and advance the work of universal Emancipation in our beloved country.

Slavery has struck its roots deep and strong in the soil of our Republic. Its growth has been like that of the tree in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, "overshadowing all the land." The beasts of the field have shadow under it, and the fowls of heaven dwell in the branches thereof," while we have congratulated each other upon the progress of correct sentiments at the North, have consulted and deliberated, remonstrated and petitioned, slavery, still true to its purpose, has relinquished none of its ancient footholds. It has involved us in a war of aggression, robbed a neighboring republic of its domains, added another state and extensive Territories to our dominions, where in to sow the poisonous seeds of oppression. It has planted its blighting foot upon the fertile soil of Texas. It is preparing to take a bolder stride into the province of New Mexico, and would fain have trodden down, with its iron heel, the free and gold besprinkled sands of California. Numbering less than the years of Egyptian bondage, modern Slavery, in this land alone, now holds in its deadly embrace three millions of human beings, and covers an area greater than many of the empires either of ancient or modern times. The entire System of Slavery is interlinked, almost inextricably, with our political, evil, social, and commercial fabric. While we would, we can scarcely extricate ourselves from the intricate web, it has woven around our very hearthstones. Custom, convenience, public opinion, all combine to fasten upon us the consumption of slave grown products.

With feelings of the utmost kindness and courtesy, would we incite our fellowmembers to weigh well their individual responsibilities, and determine, for themselves how deeply they are implicated in the guilt of oppression. Let us remember the apostolic injunction. "Be ye not partakers of other men's sins." Shall we excuse ourselves because these products were in part, furnished by means of the capital of the Slaveholder? The skill and strength employd in their production belong still to the slave: He should have been, at least, an equal sharer in the gains. But even that capital was, in many cases, the accumulated increase of long years of oppression. Can our having manufactured the material produced through slavery justify our participation? Sugar,

rice, and coffee come to us directly from the plantations of the slaveholder. Neither must we suppose that frequent exchanges or transfers of such productions, render them less objectionable. Each single exchange is only a separate link, in the lengthened, but entire chain, which unites the producer and consumer of his products. Nor can we much longer plead the excuse of ignorance. The evils of slavery are acknowledged and condemned by even the monarchies of the Old World; and the fact of our participation of its fruits, "is known and read of all men." Nor yet can that still stronger plea of necessity now avail us. We have already open numberless channels, through which we can obtain Free Labor Products, with scarcely the possibility of deception, and with the addition of little if any greater expense. But who would wish, or be willing, to enjoy the fruits of Freedom, at the same, or a less cost, than that of those produced by the compulsory surrender of every right belonging to humanity!

A clear conviction of duty, accompanied by a resolute determination to comply with its requirements, makes any, and every sacrifice easy, and the accomplishment of all our just purposes, not only desirable, but possible. The effect of such abstinence upon ourselves would be most salutary. We should daily be brought to consider the evils and crime of slavery. Our feelings would be kept alive to its enormities. We should gather from those considerations, strength, energy and perseverance, which would triumph over every obstacle, and resolutely meet all opposition to its successful progress. Ought not our Society, which has long borne so faithful a testimony against all war, to be equally clear and consistent in its opposition to slavery? Both are alike founded upon physical force. In both, the will of the many, is subjected to the controul of an irresponsible few. In the one, the worst passions of our fallen nature are let loose upon society. Our fellow beings are suddenly struck down by the pestilence, slaughtered by the sword, or made sufferers for life by the murderous weapons of death. By the other, they are denied the common right of men, deprived of the sympathies of humanity; and sink hopelessly into a premature grave, through the slow, but certain process of wasting oppression, and compulsory, exhausting toil. Has not the time now fully arrived, when we should bring to this work, that strict adherence to principle, and consistency of practice, which characterize our worthy predecessors, in the early days of our favoured Society? What a beautiful and noble example should we become, to our fellow professors, and to the community around us, could we now, unitedly take the high, consistent, and Christian ground, of entire abstinence from all the productions of slavery!

Were a friend of ours, by the remorseless Slave Trader, torn helplessly away from his wife, his children, friends, and home, without the possibility of ever beholding them, or the cherished companions of his earlier years; and compelled, under the cruel lash of the Overseer, beyond the strength of human nature, often upon scanty food, with meagre clothing, to toil in hopeless exile, with no other consolation than the hope of futurity: Further than this, should the productions of his oppressive toil, through any channel or agency, be offered for our consumption, with a knowledge of its origin, would we not turn away with utter loathing and abhorrence from the purchase, as from the price of blood? And can the wrong be less because the stamp of humanity was given to the African in a darker hue? Or because he is a hereditary bondman, liable at any moment to the sundering of every tender tie, and separation from all that renders life to him a blessing? Or was reared as a beast of burthen, to be sold, and driven from the Slave Marts in our own Capital, to the human shambles of the South West: Or, more atrocious still, was torn ruthlessly away from his kindred and country, borne scarcely a surviving sufferer, across the intervening seas; an exiled bondman, mercilessly driven to unaccustomed toil, and doomed to a life of hopeless servitude, in mental darkness and moral degradation, without the consolations of religion for his support?

Against these enormities, have we not memorialized and petitioned; and, in many instances, have not our earnest appeals fallen, coldly, ineffectually, upon the ear of government; while, in others, we have been rudely spurned away by the irresponsible, or oppressive hand of power? Our remonstrances have not been heard. And is there nothing more we can do? With mingled feelings of sorrow, for our own omissions of duty, sympathy and commiseration for the slave, and regard for the master, who may have inherited, by the necessities of the social fabric, the evils of slavery, will we not calmly say to the oppressor! 'Though you shall continue to degrade and oppress our fellow men, we can no longer partake of your unhallowed gains. You may neither feed or clothe us with the fruits of unrequited toil. *Our own* hands, and those willingly employd and remunerated in our service, must minister to our necessities.

There is a class of small proprietors, scattered throughout the Southern States, who subsist mostly by their own labor. They ought to receive our encouragement and support. For want of our assistance, shall these, who might be induced to become our firm allies, be permitted to struggle on in poverty and neglect, with a strong combination of wealth and power arrayed against them? And let us not be misunderstood.

We believe sentiments of kindness, compassion and commiseration, find a welcome home in the hearts of many, who still hold their fellowmen. They feel and deplore their hard unhappy lot. But custom, prejudice, interest, outweigh their convictions of duty ; while the strong arm of the law is extended over them, and a still stronger public opinion, with a keen and jealous eye, guards the door of mercy against their escape. These should receive our sympathy, be encouraged by our example, and assisted by our purchasing the products of their emancipated slaves.

So doing, our practice would harmonize with our principles. Interest would become subservient to duty, and we should enjoy the pleasing consciousness of having "done what we could." We might indeed hope, through the blessing of an Overruling Providence upon our humble exertions, to be instrumental in hastening that happier time, when there shall be no more the master and the slave ; when toil shall everywhere meet an adequate reward ; when in place of the dark slave ship, shall float the beautiful convoy of merchandize ; and for the marts of human traffic, upon the benighted shores of Africa, shall be found enlightened emporiums of commerce, whence would radiate beams of Science and knowledge, bearing civilization and intelligence in their course ; and when, even, in the language of prophetic vision, "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand to God." Then shall the mists of ignorance and superstition be rolled away before the rising of the Sun of Righteousness ; and from her rivers and her plains, from her vallies and her hill tops, will ascend the songs of gladness and of melody, and the mingled voices of thanksgiving and of praise.

A word of encouragement to those engaged in this work of benevolence, and we must conclude. Be ye not weary in well doing. Ask counsel of Him, with whom are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Be patient, but persevering ; mild, but firm ; persuasive, but earnest ; willing, both to do, and to sacrifice ; to labor and to wait. So may we hope, that He, whose compassionate ear, "heareth the cries of the widow and the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him," will yet open the hearts of our fellowmembers, and the professors of other religious denominations, to these practical deeds of benevolence and mercy, which would inevitably be followed by the enfranchisement of our suffering fellowmen in bonds. Then shall our hearts be made glad together, in joyfully beholding the harvest of our hopes, the fruit of our united work.